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Delivered to the Reverend the

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O F T H E

Dioceſe of St. *D A V I D*'s,

I N A

Triennial Viſitation

Of the ſame in *Auguſt*, 1728.

By the Right Reverend Father in G O D,

R I C H A R D,

Lord Biſhop of St. *D A V I D*'s.

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A

CHARGE

Deliver'd to the CLERGY of
the Diocese of St. *David's, &c.*

My Reverend Brethren,



HAVING, in the Primary Visitation of my Diocese, offer'd some Directions (among others of a like nature) for studying the Holy Scriptures to the greatest advantage, as the Foundation of Christian Faith and Morality, I cannot but think it very proper at this time to pursue the same important Subject, tho' indeed with a different View. I heartily wish the *Signs of the Times* did not so loudly call upon *Us*, who are more immediately Dedicated to the Service of

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Religion,

Religion, not only to use all proper Methods, but to make some extraordinary Efforts, for supporting the Divine Authority of those Scriptures, and vindicating the Honour of the Christian Religion, which have been lately attacked with an uncommon Virulence. But as the Society for propagating Infidelity is well-known to be extremely industrious in advancing the detestable Cause of *the Kingdom of Darkness*, so *the Children of Light*, that is, those that enjoy the Light of the Gospel, and entertain good hopes of a glorious Immortality upon *Christian Principles*, and more especially those whose Profession it is to instruct others in Christianity, ought to use all Opportunities they are favour'd with of rivalling those *Children of this World*, who are said to be so very *wise in their Generation*, tho' it be in order to spread Contagion, and to do much Mischief to the Souls of Men. And therefore at this *Critical Juncture*, when all other Controversies are ceased, or are at least suspended, but that fundamental one of the Truth of the Christian Religion, which has been of late treated with the utmost Contempt and Insolence, I think it my Duty to awaken and excite the Clergy committed to my Care and Inspection, in Consequence of a more accurate Study of the Holy Scriptures formerly recommended to You, to be more strongly fortified with those

those Arguments that chiefly support the Truth of the Christian Religion; that the Mouths of Gainfayers may be more effectually stopped by a general and learned Opposition, and the Objections of Infidels may have less Influence on ignorant or prejudiced Persons; when every Clergyman is a well-prepared Champion for his Religion, and is *ready to give a proper Answer to every one that asketh a Reason of the Hope that is in Us*. And tho' it may be presumed that the *Seniour* Part of the Clergy are Masters of the best Sort of Arguments in Defence of Christianity, and that therefore what is now aimed at, in a *Preliminary* Manner, may be thought more proper for preparing the *Younger* Sort of Clergymen for this Spiritual Warfare; yet I cannot think it unseasonable for us all, of what Age or Station soever, to resume those Weapons we formerly have, or ought to have, armed ourselves with in Vindication of our common Christianity, to refresh our Memories, and exercise anew our Understandings on so great a Subject, agreeably to the present Exigencies of the Church, and to that particular Sort of Arms which are borrowed at this time of the *Jews*, for the Service of Infidelity. I say, borrowed of the *Jews*; for as our Adversaries have appeared in different Shapes, as they have sometimes put on the false Colours of *Epicureans*, sometimes have

wore the Badge of *Fatalists*, and at other times have been disguised with some revived Christian *Heresy*, so have they of late thought fit to attack the Christian Religion with the Old Objections of our professed Enemies, the *Jews* themselves; tho' the Persons that have now adopted them, seem to believe no Sort of Revealed Religion, nor even that of Nature itself. But however personated they may be, or on whatsoever Views their repeated Attempts are made on common Christianity, it becomes our necessary Duty to study with greater Exactness the true Grounds of our Holy Religion, and to take off those false Imputations that have been laid on it, by Persons, that tho' they were baptized into it, have deserted *the Faith that was once delivered to the Saints*.

And that we may be assisted in this good Work, by a Review of a Subject that justly claims a principal Place in all our Thoughts, I shall make use of this present Opportunity to shew,

First, The general Nature of the Evidence on which Christianity is founded.

Secondly, That the particular Facts, on which Christianity is founded, are things in their own Nature most justly Credible.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That those Facts are supported by the best and most Authentick Testimonies that any matters of that Kind are Capable of.

Fourthly, That those Facts were not only well-supported by Original Testimonies, but continue to this Day to be so on the same Foundation, and are still justly Credible.

And Lastly, I shall offer some Account, in the Critical and Historical way, of the best Apologists for the Christian Religion, both among the Antients and Moderns, in order to form a rational Scheme for the more accurate study of them.

Agreeably to the Method proposed, I am to shew, *1st*, The general Nature of the Evidence on which Christianity is founded.

Nothing is more obvious to Persons of an inquisitive Temper, than that the different Natures of things require different and indeed peculiar sorts of Proof. Numbers and Figures, it is well known, admit of the strictest Demonstration. Natural Knowledge may be advanced to an high degree of Certainty by repeated Experiments and Observations on the Course of Nature, and especially when assisted by the Truths drawn from Numbers and Figures. Matters of a Moral kind are supported by Reasons drawn from the Order and Relations of things to one

another, as fixed in Nature by the great Author of it, and suited to the Benefit of Rational Beings. And thus Matters of Fact, or of an Historical nature, are only capable of being proved, either by immediately affecting the Senses of Men, or by the Credibility of their Testimonies, when related or transmitted to Others, who have not been personally conversant about them. Matters of Fact, I say, are not capable of a strict Mathematical Demonstration, but only of the Evidence that arises from Testimonies that deserve our Credit. And it is upon Credible Testimonies that all Matters of Justice and Government are administered throughout the World, and the Commerce of Mankind, and especially in remoter Countries, is carried on. And indeed all the History of the World entirely depends on this sort of Proof. Now if all the Actions of Men (with which they are not *immediately* conversant) in the common Affairs of Life depend upon Credible Testimonies, it is evident there are some proper Characters of Credibility, to which Men submit without Reluctancy, and regulate their Conduct accordingly. And this is what we usually call *Moral Certainty*; such Evidence as is suited to Matters of a Moral and Historical nature, and in which as the only Proof of its kind Men have generally been found to acquiesce. I say, generally; since

ſince ſome few Perſons have appear'd, that
 have pretended to doubt of the plainest Facts,
 and have profeſſed an Universal Sceptiſm.
 Theſe, however, have been condemned by the
 Bulk of Mankind as Unreaſonable Perſons, and
 as unqualified for the Bleſſings of Society. But
 tho' there have been ſome few Exceptions, the
 generality of Infidels have little reaſon to make
 any Objections againſt the Teſtimonies of the
Senſes ; ſince they are well-known to value them
 highly in other reſpects, to place their chief
 Happineſs in the gratification of them, and not
 to look beyond the Reports of them to matters
 of a Spiritual nature, or thoſe of another World.
 But as ſceptical as ſome Perſons may affect to
 be about Revealed Religion, and particularly
 about Chriſtianity, there is the ſtrongest Evi-
 dence poſſible in the Caſe, namely, that of the
Senſes, that there was ſuch a Perſon as *Jeſus* of
Nazareth that appear'd in the World at a fixed
 and diſtinguiſhed Juncture, and that he per-
 formed many prodigious and amazing Works.
 And whoever denies, or pretends to doubt of, ſo
 well-known and ſo fully attested a matter of
 Fact, muſt not only by juſt Conſequence deny
 his Aſſent to all Hiſtorical Evidence of paſt
 Ages, but muſt doubt of the Reality of the moſt
 Common Buſineſs of the World, as having its
 entire

entire Dependence on the Testimony of the Senses.

Secondly, The particular Facts on which Christianity is founded, are things in their own nature most justly Credible.

Now those Facts, tho' they are of great variety, are reducible to two Heads, namely, the Accomplishment of antient *Prophecies* in our Blessed Lord, and the performance of real *Miracles* by him. With relation to the former, it might be reasonably expected, that if God thought fit to send a great *Prophet* into the World, upon so important a Message as that of the Redemption of lapsed Mankind, he would prepare the Way for his coming into the World, by laying down peculiar Characters of that Prophet by a Succession of inspired Persons in different Ages, which should eminently distinguish him from all Pretenders to that high Dignity. Now in Fact the Blessed *Jesus* was thus Prophecied of, and had the most remarkable Characters assigned him by the Prophets, among a Race of Men chosen by God to hand down the Expectation of the promised Restorer, in different Ages of the World; which peculiar Marks all Center'd in him alone. Upon the first Fall of Man, he was promis'd by God him-

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self as *the Seed of the Woman that should bruise the Serpent's Head*; and afterwards, as *the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the Nations of the Earth should be Blessed*; as the *Shiloh*, or the extraordinary Messenger of God, that shou'd come into the World before the *Jews* should cease to be a distinct People; as the Prophet that should be *like to Moses*, who *was to be bearkened to* under the Penalty of Excision; as a Person to descend from *David* of the Tribe of *Judah*, to be born at *Bethlehem*, and that miraculously of *a Virgin*, and within a fixed and limited time, namely, within *Seventy Weeks* of Years from a stated *Æra*, and before the destruction of the Second Jewish *Temple*. The Characters too of his Person, his Life, and Sufferings, and Death as a Sacrifice, his Resurrection, Ascension, and Glory, and Intercession, are so fully described by *Daniel* and the *Evangelical* Prophet, that they cannot possibly Agree to any other Person than the Blessed *Jesus*, who actually Challenged them to himself as well as Completed them. But the Proofs of his Completion of them do not belong to this Head; under which it is only designed to shew, that the Facts relating to *Jesus's* Accomplishment of the antient Prophecies are very Credible things in their own nature, as being suitable to what might reasonably be expected of a

Person

Person, that ought to be distinguished by peculiar Characters and proper Descriptions, by way of preparation for his Appearance.

So likewise with regard to the *Miraculous Facts* asserted of *Jesus* Christ, they are very Credible things in their own nature ; as it could not but be justly expected by all reasonable Persons, that if it pleased God to send an eminent Prophet into the World, who was long before foretold, and generally hoped for in the appointed Age, he would give that Prophet Credit in the World, by arming him with a power of working Miracles, that is, of performing things above and contrary to the common Course of Nature, to Convince Mankind that he came from God, and was Commission'd by him to declare his Will to Men. For such Alterations, or Suspensions, of the Course of Nature, together with the respective Restitutions of it, can arise from nothing but an Interposition of the Divine Power, either by God himself, or his Ministring Spirits, or Inspired Men, at his Command ; which are therefore proper Credentials of a Prophet, who is by such peculiar Facts, and especially in concurrence with an excellent System of Morality, most evidently distinguished from all Impostors. It may fairly be expected, that such amazing Facts will awaken the Curiosity, and warm the Imaginati-

on of Men, and induce them to make proper Enquiries into the Revelation of the Prophet, who thus shews he is sent by God. And it may too be justly expected, that some *Criterion*, or Method of Judging between Truth and Imposture, would be assigned by God, that might be of universal use, and extend its Benefit to the meanest Capacities. And therefore an Appeal to the *Senses* by Miraculous Operations is the most universal Rule of Judging, and the most extensive reason of Credibility; since however Men may differ in their Intellectual Powers, they are generally on a level with regard to their Senses, which are as acute in the most ignorant as in the most learned Persons; the former of which can as easily detect a Fallacy in any Obvious Instance of suspending the known Course of Nature, and adhere as firmly to what they are assured of by their Senses, as the latter sort of Persons, tho' in other respects superiour to them. And thus, as all Men are equally good Judges, by their Senses, of what all Men have an equal Interest in, Miraculous Facts are in their own nature justly Credible. And this Consideration will receive an additional Weight, when we recollect, that as it is most worthy of God to interpose in the Case now before us, so *He* is the supposed Author of all real Miracles, whose Veracity will not allow us to imagine he will
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ever set his Seal and give his Approbation to a Lye, nor his Goodness give us leave to suspect he will at any time deceive his Creatures, that judge of the Truth of things by those Senses, that he himself gave them for that very end. These are some of the Reasons of Credibility that constitute the internal Evidence of the Facts relating to our Blessed Lord ; which being here intimated, I proceed, in the Method prescribed, to shew,

Thirdly, That those Facts are supported by the best and most Authentick Testimonies, that any Matters of that kind are capable of.

As it cannot but be allowed, that the highest and most affecting external Evidence of any Matter of Fact is that of the Senses ; so it must be acknowledged, that the *Testimonies* of the Facts that relate to our Lord, which were given by the *Apostles*, have all the force of Credibility that it's possible for any human Testimonies to carry along with them.

For they had ocular and repeated Demonstrations of the wonderful Works that were performed by their Master. They saw at the same time the Accomplishment of the antient Prophecies in him, and they were Ear-Witnesses of his Appeals to them in favour of his

Title

Title to the Messiahship. They conversed familiarly with him for some Years, and were personally present at his Miracles; and therefore were most capable of knowing the Truth, and enjoy'd all possible Opportunities of being rightly informed. *St. Matthew* and *St. John*, two Writers of those Facts, were perfectly acquainted with the whole Publick Ministry of their Master. And we are assured by Records of the earliest Antiquity, * that *St. Peter* and *St. Paul* reviewed, if not dictated, the Gospels wrote by *St. Mark* and *St. Luke*, their constant Companions and Assistants: The former of which was an *Eye-Witness of his Majesty*, and the latter was honour'd with a particular Revelation of *Jesus Christ*, and has made mention of *his own Gospel*. And indeed the other three Gospels were confirmed by *St. John*, when he wrote his Own as a Supplement to them, and thereby Compleated the *Code* of the Gospels; as we are assured by Credible Writers in the first Ages of the Church of *Christ*. †

* *Vid. Irenæum, l. 3. c. 1, & 11. — & Justin. M. Apolog. l. — & Euseb. H. E. l. 2. c. 15. & l. 3. c. 37, & 39. Ibid. — & Hieron. Proæm. in Matt. — & Tertull. adv. Marcion. l. 4. c. 5.*

† *Vid. Iren. l. 3 c. 11. — & Euseb. H. E. l. 3. c. 24. — & Hieron. Proæm. in Matt.*

And

And again, as the Apostles were well-qualified Witnesses, so did they actually give their Testimonies of the Facts relating to our Lord with great Fidelity. They were Persons of such unaffected Simplicity, as to record their own Frailties and Imperfections; and likewise of that Integrity, as to expose themselves to the Hatred of the World, to Persecutions, Tortures, and Death it self of the most terrible kinds, by firmly adhering to those very Testimonies. They were indeed so free from all Worldly Views and Corrupt Motives, that even *Vaninus*, the Atheist, could not fasten the least suspicion upon them of affecting secular Honour or Interest.

It is then as evident as any thing of an Historical nature can be, that the Apostles themselves did most firmly believe the Truth of those Facts that they attested. But since, to weaken their Evidence, it has been suggested that they might be under the influence of a strong *Enthusiasm*, and attest what was not really Fact, but existed only in their disorder'd Imagination; it may, and ought to, be Replied to so absurd and profane a Supposition, that as their Writings shine with a genuine Virtue and sincere Piety, so do they most clearly evince the Composers of them to have been Persons of a sober Temper and sound Understanding, and under no early Prepossession, but their National one of
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expecting a temporal Deliverer in their Messiah, of which they were gradually disabused. And indeed *St. Paul*, whose Epistolary Writings, in Conjunction with the Gospel ratified at least by him, constitute so great a Part of the New Testament, was so acute as well as learned a Writer, that it has been acknowledged by one of the best Reasoners of the present Age, that no one can doubt of *St. Paul's* being an excellent Reasoner, that understands the Art of Reasoning himself.

Once more; If there had not been such a real Coincidence of the several Marks of Distinction in our blessed Lord, that were assign'd on that Occasion by the antient Prophets, all the Attestations of the Apostles would have had little Influence on the Minds of Men, but would have been universally exploded as Subornation and Forgery. Whereas it has been granted by the warmest Adversaries of our Religion, that there was in Fact such a Person as *Jesus* that appear'd in *Judæa*, and challenged to himself the distinguishing Characters that belong'd to that eminent Person; that was to arise at a certain Time and Place, and agreeably to all other Circumstances long before foretold: So that the Attestations of the Apostles are in some measure confirmed, by the Acknowledgment of several Facts relating to *Jesus* Christ by the *Jews*, and other Unbelievers of Christianity.

And it is most remarkably evident, with regard to the Miraculous Facts of *Jesus Christ* that are attested by the Apostles, that the Manner of the Performance of them was inconsistent with a false Attestation. For they were generally performed in so publick a Manner, before Enemies as well as Friends, and that so often, and in so great a Variety of Instances; that as the Enemies of our Lord had sufficient Opportunities of detecting any Imposture in them, so they were forced to acknowledge the wonderful Works that were performed by him with so great Notoriety of Fact. It has been confess'd by the antient *Jews*, not only in our Gospels, but in their *Talmud*, that amazing Works were actually perform'd by *Jesus of Nazareth*. And indeed these Facts were not denied by the other implacable as well as artful Enemies of his Religion. No, not by *Celsus* or *Hierocles*, or *Julian* the Apostate himself; tho' they all gave a malicious, but unnatural Turn, to those Facts they could not but acknowledge: Such, for Instance, was the superior Power of *Magick* in *Jesus*, and the unaccountable Charm of a Word, or Words, used by him, that were pretended by some of them; and an Equality of miraculous Performances, by *Apollonius* the Magician, that was pleaded for by others, and virtually included an Acknowledgment of the Reality of the prodigious

ous Works of our Lord. But as absurd as these Suppositions were, the Authors of them confirmed by their own Concessions the Testimonies of the Apostles, with regard to the Reality of Facts, that were too well known to be denied. And consequently, many of the miraculous Facts of our Lord were so circumstantiated, as to have been inconsistent with the Supposition of a false Attestation by the Apostles, if they had been capable of so wicked an Artifice; which has been likewise shewn to have been morally impossible.

And surely if the Facts relating to our Blessed Lord are thus established by the Testimonies of the Apostles, consider'd as well-inform'd and faithful Witnesses; how much additional Force do they receive, when we recollect that those very Witnesses, chosen by God for that very End, were themselves endued with a Power of working Miracles; by which they evinced, in the *Demonstration of the Spirit*, that they were invested with Authority from Heaven. The Acknowledgment of their own miraculous Operations by their greatest Enemies, and particularly by *Julian* himself, gave a strong Confirmation to their Testimonies of the Facts relating to their Master; and more especially when *they* were acknowledg'd by that most spiteful Enemy of the Christian Name, to have been the Authors

of those historical Books concerning *Jesus Christ*, whose Names are prefixed to them. No wonder then that the Testimonies of the Facts relating to our Lord, as given by the Apostles, and thus confirmed by Heaven it self, were render'd so irresistible, as to bear down before them all the Power of Heathen Princes, the Malice of the *Jews*, and the Prejudices of the immoral as well as the learned Part of the World, and to spread the Religion of *Jesus* in a speedy and triumphant Manner to the most remote Parts of the Earth. *For if we receive the Witness of Men, the Witness of God is greater.*

Now if all this can only be understood of the Facts relating to our Lord in the *literal Sense*, namely, that he was born, and lived, and performed miraculous Operations, and died, and rose again, in the plain and obvious Sense of the Words, how despicable an Opinion ought we to entertain of those *Allegorical Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*, which are at present so warmly contended for, in Opposition to the *literal Prophecies of the Messiah*, with regard to the distinguishing Character and peculiar Circumstances of that eminent Person. For what are those *Allegorical Allusions*, consider'd without *literal* and real Facts, but a sandy Foundation assign'd to Christianity, in order to subvert the whole, and expose it to the Contempt of

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of Infidels? And how low must our Faith be suppos'd to run, when the proper Distinctions of the *Messiah* are asserted to have been *literally* fulfilled in other Persons, and *figuratively* only in our blessed Lord?

In like manner, how ought we to reject with a just Abhorrence the *Allegorical* Scheme of our Saviour's *Miracles*, as laid down and prosecuted in *some late Discourses upon them*? For if all that is recorded in the Gospels about our Saviour's Miracles be mere Figure and Parable, and be only *Prophetical* of some future Performances of *Christ*, as is expressly asserted by the Author of those *Discourses*, it is a necessary Consequence that the Testimonies of the Apostles are vain and insignificant; since in this *Scheme* they are not supposed to witness any real miraculous Facts, as actually performed by our Lord, but only to foretell in a *mystical* manner, what mighty Works he will perform hereafter. A Scheme of *Allegory* this, that is so far from being protected by the innocent, tho' excessive *Allegories* of some of the *Fathers*, who notwithstanding asserted and believed, in the proper Sense of the Word, the miraculous Facts of *Jesus Christ*, that it undermines the very Foundation of his Religion, which is principally built on those real miraculous Facts. And thus our Lord's Resurrection it self, the most comprehensive Article

of our Faith, as well as all his other miraculous Works, are denied in the *literal* Sense by that Author; tho' we are assured, that *with great Power the Apostles gave Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, and that the *Word preached by them was confirmed by Signs following*. But indeed this profane Writer has subverted the Foundation of his own wild *Scheme*, whilst he aimed at doing so to the *literal* Sense of the Gospel. For if those Miracles of our Lord which the Apostles asserted were real Facts, his *Scheme* sinks at once; and if they were not real Facts, but mere prophetic *Figures*, the Reason of their future Accomplishment entirely vanishes. For if those Prophetic *Figures* are grounded on no real *Facts*, and therefore have no Foundation at all, they will, consequently, be no more fulfill'd in the *New Jerusalem*, (to which the said Author refers them) than the *Facts* relating to our Lord were actually performed in or near the Old one. Which is a *Scheme* that more justly deserves Ridicule, than any pretended Circumstances of the miraculous Works of our Lord, which this Buffoon-Writer has dared to misrepresent, and treat with much Scorn and Insolence. But as his Pretensions are highly *Enthusiastical*, and without any just Foundation, so all his impious Burlesque of the *literal* Sense of our Saviour's Miracles, cannot alter the real Nature

Nature of any one Matter of Fact recorded in the Gospel, and attested so powerfully by his Apostles. But I go on to shew,

4thly, That the Facts relating to our Lord were not only well supported by original Testimonies, but continue to this Day to be so on the same Foundation, and are still justly credible.

For if it be pretended, that the Apostles Testimonies of the Facts relating to our Lord, consider'd too as ratified by Heaven it self, have been convey'd to us thro' the hands of Fallible Men, and that therefore all Assent to those Testimonies, however Divine, is founded on our previous Assent to that human Testimony which conveys them to us; to this it may be replied, that the original Conveyers of those Testimonies by Writing were in an extraordinary Manner excited, illuminated, and assisted, in the Composition of those Writings, by which their Testimonies were safely conveyed, not only throughout *Judæa*, and the neighbouring Countries, but to *the uttermost Parts of the World*. And that they were so inspired, is very justly credible from the Testimonies of the Primitive *Fathers*, in Concurrence with the universal Tradition of the Christian Church all along to this Day, and the intrinsic Excellency of those sacred Writings.

If it be farther pretended, that the numerous Variations that occur in the Copies of those

Writings, in which the well-attested Facts relating to our Lord are recorded, diminish the Force and Authority of them; to this too it may be answer'd, that tho' it must be granted that Variations of Copies of all antient Books, both sacred and profane, have unavoidably happen'd, in a long Course of Ages, by the Frailty of their Transcribers; yet that it is most evident to all that have critically examin'd the Variations of the sacred Copies, which are far from being more numerous than those we meet with in other antient Writings, that there is not one Article of Faith, or any moral Precept, or the least Testimony of the Apostles, that is so affected by them, as to weaken the Force of them, and much less to annul and destroy them.

And again, if it be suggested, that the Credibility of all human Testimonies, supposed originally true, decreases in Proportion to the Distance from the Time in which they lived who gave those Testimonies; to this it may be replied, that in Cases where the Testimonies of Men, and especially those that were appointed for that very End and Purpose, were at first firmly establish'd, and were originally credible, as has now been shewn to have been the Case of the Testimonies of the Apostles; and that likewise where the Monuments or Records that preserve those Testimonies have been faithfully, and without material

material Alterations, transmitted to future Ages, as has also been shewn to be the Case of the Facts relating to our Lord; the Credibility of those Testimonies continues the very same in succeeding Ages as in the primitive Times, notwithstanding the Shews of *Demonstration* that not long ago were misapplied to a pretended Proof of the contrary. And this Assertion will be more clear and evident, when it is duly consider'd, that succeeding Ages have the peculiar Advantage of having had transmitted to them none but the Genuine Gospels, whose Authenticalness was establish'd in the Primitive Ages, by a just Distinction made between them and the numerous *Apocryphal* Gospels and pretended *Acts* that were forged by the antient Hereticks, and were accordingly rejected by the best Judges of the *Canonical* Writings of the New Testament, the Primitive Church. And indeed it is an Addition to the present Argument, that those antient Monuments of the Facts relating to *Jesus Christ*, and attested by the Apostles, acquire some new Force and Strength from a long Course of Time, in which they not only are cited as the very same by the Writers of all succeeding Ages; but likewise as several Prophecies of future Events, recorded in an antient Book of Facts, so strongly confirmed by Testimonies, have been since exactly fulfilled. And consequently, even in these remo-

ter Ages it is still a faithful or credible Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the World to save Sinners. But I proceed,

5thly, and lastly, to offer some Account, in the critical and historical Way, of the best *Apolo-gists* for the Christian Religion, both among the Antients and Moderns, in order to form a rational Scheme for the more accurate Study of them, agreeably to the present Exigencies of the Church.

Though the Writings of many of the *Apolo-gists* for the Christian Religion in the earliest Ages, such as *Eusebius's* 30 Books in answer to *Porphry*, and the latter 10 Books of *Cyriel* in answer to *Julian*, are entirely lost, and tho' there are only some Fragments left of some others of them; yet, God be thanked, there are several very antient *Apologies* now extant, that, besides the intrinsick Evidence offer'd by them for our holy Faith, have fully established the external Testimonies of those Facts, on which the Credibility of the Christian Religion is grounded. And agreeably to the present Subject, I shall now select some of those early *Apologists*, that insist on Facts, without taking notice of those in the first Ages, that made it their chief Business to expose the Idolatrous Worship of the Heathens, or to vindicate the Christians from
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the scandalous Imputations that were cast upon them; two Subjects, that engrossed the Pens of many of the antient *Apologists*.

The first that occurs is *Quadratus*, a Disciple of the Apostles, who presented an Apology for the Christians to the Emperor *Adrian*; of which a very material Fragment is preserved in the History of *Eusebius* *, who saw the whole: Namely, "That none could doubt of the Truth
" of the Miracles of Jesus Christ, because the
" Persons that were healed or raised from the
" Dead by him, had been seen, not only when
" he wrought his Miracles, or whilst he was
" upon Earth, but even a very great while after
" his Death; so that there are many, says he,
" that were yet living in our Time."

The next Writer I shall mention is *Justin Martyr*; who in his Apology offered to *Antoninus Pius*, about 140 Years after Christ, is not only very copious in his Citations of antient Prophecies relating to our Lord, and particularly with regard to the Miracles perform'd by him, but he expressly appeals to the *Roman Census*, the Description or Taxation under *Cyrenius*, for the Birth of *Jesus Christ*, and to the Publick *Acts* and Commentaries of *Pilate* for the Truth of his miraculous Works, and the authentick Account of his Death. And indeed in his *Dialogue with Trypho*

* Euseb. H. E. l. 4. c. 3.

the Jew, he pursues the Proof of *Jesus's* Title to the *Messiahship*, by a Multitude of Texts cited out of the Old Testament in favour of him.

Tertullian too, about 200 Years after Christ, in his famous *Apology* for the Christians, appeals for the Truth of the Predictions of the antient Prophets about *Jesus* Christ, and likewise of his Miracles, and the extraordinary *Eclipse* which happen'd at his Death, together with the great *Earthquake* at the same time, to the Records of the Heathens, and particularly to the Testimony of *Pilate* as sent to *Tiberius*, the Roman Emperour; who would, in Consequence, have voted him in the Senate into the Number of their Gods. And to these Proofs *Tertullian* adds another wonderful Fact, namely, the Establishment of the Church, notwithstanding the Rage of Persecutions.

Origen deserves to be consider'd next, both in order of Time, namely, as he flourished in the former part of the Third Century, and likewise out of a just Respect to his real Merits, most signally display'd in his admirable Vindication of the Christian Religion, against the Sophistry of its most malicious Adversary, *Celsus*, the *Epicurean*. A Work of great Learning and Accuracy, and indeed the very best *Apology* for our holy Faith which is come down to us from the Primitive Times. For he establishes the Christian Religion by the History of our Lord, his miracu-
lous

lous Works, his Death, and his Resurrection. He appeals for the truth of the præternatural *Eclipse*, and concomitant *Earth-quake*, at our Saviour's Passion and Death, in confirmation of the fore-mentioned Facts, to *Pblegon's Chronicon* then extant. Indeed *Celsus* himself, in the large Quotations from his Treatise against the Christians made by *Origen* *, cites the Gospels for several Facts concerning *Christ*, and particularly acknowledges that he cured the Blind and the Lame, and raised the Dead, tho' he calumniates those Facts as Magical Impostures, and perversly denies that they prove *Jesus* to be the Son of God.

To him I shall add *Eusebius* of *Cæsarea*, who in his large Works of *Evangelical Preparation and Demonstration* has not only exposed the Falseness of the Gentile Religion, and the imperfection of the Jewish, but has evinced from a long Train of Jewish Prophecies that *Jesus* is the promised Messiah, and from his Miracles and Doctrines that he was no Impostor. And all this with a great Variety of Testimonies and Arguments and Learning. And indeed it is to be lamented, that his ten last Books of the *Demonstration of the Gospel* are entirely lost. However this Loss is in some measure repair'd by

* *Vid. l. 2. c. Cels.*

the Facts about *Jesus Christ* related in his *Chronicon*, a great part of which noble Work is still extant, in which he appeals to the Testimonies of the forementioned *Pblegon* (some Fragments of which accurate Chronologer he has preserved) for the truth of the foresaid Eclipse and Earth-quake at our Lord's Crucifixion. And in *Eusebius's* Treatise against *Hierocles* that is still Extant, he has not only shewn that *Apollonius Tyanæus*, proposed by that Philosopher as a Rival of *Jesus Christ* with regard to *Miraculous* Performances, admits of no Comparison with him, and that his Life wrote by *Philostratus*, and extant at this Day, is Fabulous and Romantick, (tho' intended by an *Empress* for the Support of Paganism) but likewise that by *Hierocles's* drawing a Parallel, tho' a very unjust one, between the Miracles of *Christ* and *Apollonius*, he acknowledges that *Jesus* did actually and in fact work Miracles, tho' he endeavours to depreciate them by that vile Comparison.

Another Apologist for Christianity that I shall mention on this Occasion, is *Cyril of Alexandria*, who Replied to *Julian* the Apostate that had attacked the Christian Religion with the greatest Insolence and Ridicule. His Work is a full and solid Confutation of what *Julian* had objected, in a more general way, against

Jesus Christ and his Religion, consisting of ten Books wrote in answer to the first Book of *Julian* against the *Gospels*. And it is great Pity but we had his Answer to the other two Virulent Books of that Apostate. However as *Cyril* has given us very large Extracts of *Julian* in his own Words, we find that *Julian* acknowledged that *Jesus* Christ had performed Miraculous Cures on the Blind and Lame, and had dispossessed Dæmons; tho' he pretended to account for those wonderful Performances by a Superior Skill in Magick; which was what he himself was most zealously addicted to, in order to retrieve the Cause of Paganism and the Worship of *Dæmons*. But how false soever that Hypothesis is, the said Facts relating to *Jesus Christ* were confessed by him to be true.

I should detain you too long if I enter'd into an exact Abridgment of St. *Austin's* great Work of *the City of God*, St. *Chrysostome's* Discourses against the *Jews*, and *Theodoret's Therapeutick, or Cure of the Passions and Prejudices of the Greeks*; all which are most learned and excellent Performances in defence of the Christian Religion, and which more especially insist on the Facts relating to our Blessed Lord, and the wonderful Propagation of the Gospel throughout the World. But I heartily recommend them, as some of the best Pieces of Antiquity

tiquiry on this Subject, to your diligent Perusal, tho' I have not time allow'd me to lay before you a more minute account of them on this Occasion.

But I now hasten to the *Modern* Writers in favour of Christianity, the most eminent of which, as selected out of a great number of them, are those that follow, which are ranged as near as may be in order of time. The Treatise of the *Truth of the Christian Faith* by *Ludovicus Vives*, a Person that contributed to the Revival of antient Learning, and flourished at the very beginning of the Reformation, must be allow'd to be very Instructive as well as Entertaining. It was wrote with Care, was the Result of many Years, and indeed the last Work of his Life. And if his Arguments are somewhat diffused, and not always so close and pressing as those of some other Writers, yet they must be allow'd to be very good, and set off with great Variety of pleasing Dialogues, and couched in familiar Conversations on this important Subject; both in Vindication of the Christian Religion, and in Confutation of Jews, Mahometans, and Pagans.

De Mornay's Book of the *Truth of Christianity* abounds not only with a great deal of antient Learning, set off with all the Embellishments of an elegant Pen, in his Preparatory
Proofs

proofs of Natural Religion, but has clear and excellent Arguments for the Messiahship of *Jesus*, and confirms the Credibility of the Gospel by the Antient *Jewish* Authors and Philosophical *Gentiles*. And indeed his Defence of our Holy Faith is wrote with so honest a Spirit and so unaffected a Sincerity, as to Excuse his attempt to prove the Doctrine of the *Trinity* by the mere light of Nature, and particularly by *Platonical* Arguments; as well as to Apologize for his Quotations of some Antient Authors, that have been thought of dubious and suspected Credit by several learned Persons, as has been insinuated by *Grotius* * in the Introduction to his own immortal Performance on this great Subject; (as well as elsewhere; †) which I now go on to consider.

This Work of *Grotius*, of the Truth of the Christian Religion, is without Controversy one of the most rational, learned, and convincing Treatises, that ever appeared in Vindication of Christianity. His Arguments for it, besides those offer'd for its intrinsic Excellency, are founded upon Facts, and those Facts well supported by just and proper Authorities both Sacred and Profane. And indeed his own Annotations on his Judicious

* *Vid.* Grot. de Ver. Christ. Rel. l. 1. p. 2, 3.

† *Vid.* Grot. Epist. ad Voss. inter Præst. Vir. Ep. p. 797.

Book are worthy of so great a Master of Critical Learning, and in some respects as Valuable as his Book it self. No one has more accurately consider'd the Proofs of Christianity in the way of Facts and Testimonies; and no one has in so small a Compass more solidly confuted Paganism, Mahometism, and modern Judaism. And if he were assisted in the Composure of this Book by several other Authors on the same Subject, and more especially by the Valuable performance of a Writer otherwise justly of ill Fame, I mean, *Faustus Socinus's* little Book *de Auctoritate S. Scripturæ* *, this Assistance, I say, is no more than what *Grotius* himself has frankly acknowledg'd in general terms; when, in the Prefatory part of his Treatise, he declares, that having read all proper Books on that Occasion, he selected out of Antient and Modern Authors those Arguments that had the greatest Weight with him, and upon the use of his own Judgment really convinced him. And no doubt this incomparable Work of his would have the same influence on the Minds of others, that will not only peruse it with impartiality, but make themselves, by an attention suitable to so important a Subject, absolute Masters both of his Arguments and Annotations on

* Steinfurthi, A. 1611. Edit. Vorst.

them. And therefore the repeated study of this admirable little Book cannot be too warmly recommended by me at this Juncture, and more especially to the Younger part of my Clergy.

The next eminent Modern Defender of the Christian Religion that I shall mention, is Bishop *Stillingfleet*, one of the brightest Ornaments of our Church and Nation for his great and universal Learning. Of this he has given an eminent Instance in his *Origines Sacrae*, a Work that truly Answers to its Title of *Rational Grounds of the Christian Faith*. In this Elaborate Treatise not only the Principles and Sophistry of the Adversaries of Natural and Revealed Religion are Confuted and Exposed, but the Truth of the Christian Religion is firmly established on the Facts relating to our Lord, and particularly on the accomplishment of the Antient Prophecies in him, and the performance of real Miracles by him; and all this upon an impartial Tryal of Prophetical Predictions and Miracles in general. This is a work, that tho' it may be styled *Juvenile* with regard to the Age of its Author, yet was performed with all the Judgment of riper Years. And if it had pleased God to have granted leisure to that most learned Person, in his more advanced Years, not only to have model'd anew, but to have actually adapted in a more exact manner the Scheme

of that Work to the later Objections of Infidels, as the great Author of it propos'd to do, it had arriv'd no doubt at a degree of Perfection beyond what the Christian World has hitherto seen among all the Modern Writers on that Subject. And to this Performance we ought to subjoin, by way of Appendix, the same learned Person's *Letter to a Deist*, wrote in his maturer Age, and that contains very Judicious Solutions of the principal Objections advanced by that Sett of Men against the Authority of the Holy Scriptures.

However, the forementioned defect has been in good measure supplied by *Huetius's Demonstratio Evangelica*, a Work of great exactness and Learning, put into a Mathematical Dress, and adorned with Propositions, Demonstrations, and Corollaries, as far as the nature of the thing will admit. In this excellent Performance, the particular Testimonies of the Facts recorded in the Gospel are more fully expatiated on, and more minutely vindicated from the Objections of our Adversaries, than in other Apologies. And as the Title of it is borrowed from the great Work of the famous *Eusebius*, so does this Work it self, in imitation of that learned *Father*, so abound with Testimonies and other Proofs of the Facts of our Lord, as to make some amends
for

for the lost Books of that antient Bishop on this very Subject.

The friendly Conference of Professor Limborch with a learned Jew, about the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, deserves likewise to be mentioned here with Honour. For by more Credible and valid Testimonies in favour of *Jesus*, than the *Jew* could produce in favour of *Moses*, on whom he believed in virtue of those very Testimonies, our Author triumphed over the learned *Jew*, answered his Objections, and established the Truth of the *Christian Religion* in a very rational and convincing manner: As indeed *Origen* had done before him, by the use of the same method, in his Answer to *Celsus*.

Another learned Person, afterwards a Prelate of our Church, *Kidder*, Bishop of *Bath and Wells*, began, a little before *Limborch's* Work appeared, his *Demonstration of the Messiah*; to which after some Years he added two other Volumes. As he was particularly conversant in the *Jewish Learning*, he was very well qualified for proving the Truth of the *Christian Religion*, not merely from the usual Topicks, but by answering the most subtle *Jewish* Objections. And as *Limborch* Replied to the Manuscript-Papers of a learned *Jew*, so did He solve the Difficulties contained in two virulent Manuscript-Treatises against the Truth of Christianity, industriously handed about by the *Jewish Rabbins*, and given

out to be unanswerable. But as the Poison was diffused in a secret manner, so was an Antidote proportionable to it communicated by our Author publicly to the World; which was well received, and has met with good success.

Another Treatise of the Truth of the Christian Religion that deserves particular notice, is that of *Abbadie*, a learned *French* Refugeè, lately departed this Life; who not only has laid down, and vindicated, the General Principles of all Religion, in an easy but convincing way of Reasoning, but has firmly established the Truth of the Gospel on Uncontestable Facts; and after he had placed in a very clear light the Prophecies and Miracles of Jesus Christ, answered the Objections of the Incredulous in a satisfactory and rational manner.

I think my self obliged to add, at once, to the preceding Writers on this Subject two others in our own Country, that at a small interval of time laid down a few short Rules, both for Demonstrating the Certainty of the Christian Religion, as it is founded on matters of Fact, considered as publicly performed, well attested, and faithfully transmitted by standing Memorials to future Ages; and likewise for detecting any religious Impostures, by an Application of the peculiar and distinguishing Characters of them there assign'd; a particular Instance of which

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is given in the Imposture of *Mahomet*. These are contain'd in *Lestly's short and easy Method with the Deists and Jews*, and *Prideaux's Letter to the Deists* at the end of his excellent *Life of Mahomet*. And indeed they are both of them very happily coincident in giving a Concise Historical Demonstration of the Truth of the Christian Religion.

Another of our learned Countrymen ought not in Justice to be Omitted on this Occasion, I mean, the late Professor *Jenkin*; whose rational Vindication of the Truth and Excellency of the Christian Religion deserves very justly the Applause of all good Men among us. But tho' his Argument falls in with our present Subject, as founded on the Facts of the Gospel, yet since his finished Treatise is now, or ought to be, in all Men's hands that are pleased with rational Evidence for their Religion, and desire the strongest Conviction possible of the certainty of Christianity, I shall only recommend in general so Valuable a Performance to the Perusal of my Brethren of the Clergy, as part of that *Armour of Faith* which it is necessary to put on in defence of the Gospel of Christ.

I cannot with Decency Conclude this Critical Catalogue of the distinguished Champions for Christianity, without a short Recommendation of another Writer on this Subject, *Houtte-*

ville, a learned *Frenchman* now living ; who has very lately obliged the World with a large and excellent Performance, in which he has laid aside all other Topicks, and established the Truth of the Christian Religion entirely on the *Facts* relating to *Jesus Christ*, both in his Accomplishment of Prophecies and Performance of Miracles. And it must be acknowledged, that he has not only stated very justly those important *Facts*, but cleared them from the Objections of Infidels both Antient and Modern. And I recommend this Work with the greater Satisfaction, not only because of its immediate Connexion with the Subject of the present Discourse, but on account of the Opportunity I now enjoy of giving some sort of new Publication to a Book, that is not yet so well known in the World as it merits to be, and especially in the present situation of Religion among us.

If I were not sensible into how great a Bulk this Discourse is already swelled, I might subjoin an Appendix of very excellent and useful Writers on the preceding Subject ; I mean, of those that have distinguished themselves on this Argument in the Lecture founded by the justly celebrated Mr. *Boyle*, together with those that have vindicated Christianity against the late, or rather the present, Attempts of Infidelity, as carried on by the Author or Authors of the *Grounds and Reasons*

sons of Christianity falsely so stiled, and of the pretended Confutation of the *Literal Scheme of Prophecy*. On which Occasion no one has appear'd with greater Honour to himself, and Edification of the Church, than my very learned Brother the present *Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield*. But the Praise of living admired Authors is not only too difficult to be attempted, and especially towards the Period of the present Discourse, but that worthy Prelate is as much above all Views of Applause, as his two elaborate Treatises on this Subject really deserve it.

Upon the whole, tho' so considerable a Number of Authors on this great Subject have been now recommended to you, my dear Brethren, (the Length of which Recommendation will, I trust, be excused by the Weight and Importance of the present Argument) yet they are not all prescribed as equally necessary, tho' it be highly so that some or other of them are to be procured, and studied diligently, by every one of you, as of the last Consequence to the Church of Christ. Particulars must be left to every one's Opportunities of procuring them, as well as private Circumstances in point of Expence. But however slender the Income of some Livings in this Diocese may be, some Portion of it surely ought to be dedicated to the Support of *Christianity* it self among us. And even those Clergymen that
live

live in the more narrow District of a Country-Retirement, and at a considerable Distance from the great and publick Scene of this Kingdom, are not to be entirely excused from this spiritual Service; since, by the unaccountable Industry of the Adversaries of our Religion, the Poison of Infidelity is spread far and near; and consequently a proportionable Diligence becomes the professed Guardians of Religion in administering proper spiritual Antidotes, both for preventing farther Infection, and curing those that already labour under some Symptoms of it. And since from what has been laid before you, with regard to the several Writers now recommended, the great Subserviency of *human Learning* to the just Maintenance of that which is Divine does fully appear, I conjure you in the most solemn manner, and that more particularly in such a *Crisis* of Religion, to come to fresh Resolutions to review your former Studies, and to apply your selves anew with a suitable Industry and Zeal to all such Parts of Learning, as may be thought serviceable to the Support of the Christian Religion in Opposition to all Gainsayers. And I cannot but add that I hope, upon your perusing the *Antient Apologists*, you will labour to transcribe into your own Lives that Zeal for Religion, that Contempt of the World, that Sanctity of Manners, and that Heavenly-mindedness, by which they are at least

least as much distinguished as by their primitive Arguments. You will too be assured, upon a thorough Examination of the great Controversy now depending, that if any History in the World is true, or indeed can be proved to be so, it is that of the Matters of Fact which relate to *Jesus Christ*; since they are much better attested than any other whatsoever. This Consideration is not only the Source of true Joy and inward Satisfaction to all sincere Lovers of the Christian Religion, but it likewise points out the Difficulties that the present Patrons of Infidelity are really reduced to. Since on the same Bottom that they deny their Assent to the Gospel-History, they must, by unavoidable Consequence, discard *all History* whatsoever; and indeed (if they act consistently) must doubt to such a Degree of the Truth of all Testimonies used in common Life, as is incompatible with that Justice and Business of the World, as are agreed on all Sides to be absolutely necessary to Civil Society. And if you frequently recollect not only the *Facts* relating to our Lord, and the *Grounds* on which they stand unmoveable; but likewise consider that they were written by the most *credible* Witnesses, *that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that so believing we might have Life thro' his Name*; and if you thus strive together for *the Faith of the Gospel, and are in nothing terrified*
by

by those Adversaries of Religion that have denied the Lord that bought them, and counted the Blood of his Covenant wherewith they had been sanctified an unholy Thing, and done Despite to the Spirit of Grace, you will not only be good Souldiers under the Captain of our Salvation in this Holy War, and fight successfully the good Fight of Faith; but there will be laid up for you a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away, which the great Bishop of our Souls, and righteous Judge of all, will undoubtedly bestow on all his faithful Servants at the last decisive Visitation of the World. For which that we may be all prepar'd by a due Use of our respective Talents, and may accordingly enter into the Joy of our Lord, may God grant for Jesus Christ his sake, &c.

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